

DDI Chrono DDE - 03604/ES

24 July 1985

MEMORANDUM FOR: Director of Central Intelligence
THROUGH: Deputy Director for Intelligence
Director of Soviet Analysis
FROM:
Senior Analyst for National Issues
Office of Soviet Analysis
SUBJECT: Follow-up to Disinformation Conference

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1. Action required: None. This memorandum, which reports on the outcome of the 25-27 June Conference on Contemporary Soviet Propaganda and Disinformation (CSPD), is for information only.

Conference Results

2. In practical terms, the conference produced much new evidence on the problem of disinformation, although not as much as hoped for, perhaps, on the semantic dimension per se. Thirteen formal papers were prepared, and approximately 21 hours of discussion exist on tape. Overall, the quality of the papers, oral presentations, and general discussions is quite high--probably the result of the participants' having been informed that some sort of conference proceedings would be published. (How this will be accomplished is discussed below.)

3. As you know, one of the primary purposes of the conference was to highlight the problem that we face in recognizing disinformation's various guises. In this regard, the conference was very successful. The academic papers, especially the case studies, focused attention on specific manifestations of the problem. This forced the audience, as well as the authors, to identify and recognize various forms of disinformation. Perhaps even more useful, however, was the testimony--sometimes written, but more often off-the-cuff--of participating Soviet and East European defectors and emigres, whose accounts of their "hands-on" experience helped considerably to bring home the reality of disinformation's forms and techniques. In fact, the conference was unique in bringing together such a large number of these ex-Soviets with academics and government specialists. This compositional mix produced a good exchange of views and experiences.

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4. At the same time, the conference produced no consensus on the need for Western scholars to deal directly with the issue of disinformation in their work. Indeed, the conference's final session reflected some marked differences of view among academics on this score. Some argued the need not only to examine closely the "ambiguity and contradictoriness" of Soviet policy, but to take a "moral" position in doing so. Others, while recognizing that disinformation is a significant factor in creating this "ambiguity and contradictoriness," were clearly resistant to this notion, appearing to equate a "moral" position with a "political" one.

5. These differences apparently reflected differing philosophical views as outlined by Norman Podhoretz in his keynote address on the causes of Western vulnerability to semantic manipulation. Despite this, the participants appeared to agree fully on the need for the government to neutralize and counter Soviet disinformation--primarily through greater efforts at consciousness-raising among the media and the public.

Follow-up Steps

6. In organizing the conference, we made clear that some sort of publication would result, and without exception all the conference participants strongly supported this intention. We have considered publishing a simple compilation of the formal papers but decided that too much valuable information and analysis--especially that provided by the defectors--would be lost. We therefore are having the taped proceedings transcribed as quickly as possible in order to prepare a conference report that includes synopses of the numerous oral presentations and discussions. The report will be given broad dissemination by the State Department.

7. A number of the conferees suggested that a list of participants would be useful to keep each other informed and to involve each other in related work as time passes. Some saw this as a first step in helping to create a network of specialists interested in disinformation issues. Accordingly, we have sent such a list (excluding the names of CIA staffers except me) to the conference participants.

8. Another suggestion that many conferees made at the conference and in subsequent correspondence was to have a follow-up conference examine possible countermeasures. A small sample of this correspondence is attached (including an earlier letter from Aaron Levenstein proposing the creation of a privately funded Center for Propaganda Research).

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9. We have discussed the idea of a follow-on conference with the
NIO/FDIA [REDACTED]

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[REDACTED] If an academic conference were to be held, however, SOVA believes that it should be conducted under the auspices of the State Department, as it would be likely to deal explicitly with issues touching on domestic sensitivities.

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DDI/SOVA/NIG, (24 July 85)

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